



Amalipe Newsletter

Issue #8, 2007

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The Center for educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities approved the first projects – At the beginning of October, the Center for educational integration announced the results from its first call for proposals. Projects had been submitted in four programs: Preserving and developing of the cultural identity; creating preconditions for successful socialization of children and young people of minority origin; supporting the process of converting the cultural diversity into a source and factor for mutual respect and spiritual development [...] and creating atmosphere for mutual tolerance and understanding.

OBSERVER

More than 400 projects had been submitted in the four programs for the total amount of 1,000,000 BGN. 236 out of them were nominated for the second round. 83 were finally approved. 20 out of the approved projects are submitted by schools, municipalities, and other institutions Center Amalipe has been working with. A significant part of them have passed the trainings for preparing projects organized by Center Amalipe in July

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LOCAL ELECTIONS 2007: SOME FACTS

After the local elections which took part in Bulgaria on October 28, 2007 the number of city councilors elected from “Roma parties” has been significantly reduced: from 126 in 2003 to 93 in 2007. At the same time the number of votes for Roma parties is outstandingly high: 76236 people (just to compare - no matter how conditional comparisons in this case are – at the parliamentary elections in 2005 the only Roma party which ran for the elections got 45 637 votes). This paradox situation is due to the introducing of an election barrier which reaches 9% for the small municipalities and makes it impossible for the small parties to enter the local parliaments. It is also due to the controversies between the different Roma parties and their competing for the elections. This has resulted in dissipating the scarce number of Roma votes. The Roma political elite did not turn to be politically mature enough to convert the higher number of votes for them into more mandates.

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OBSERVER

Annual meeting of the OSCE

The Chairman of Center “Amalipe” took part in the Annual meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that took place from September 24 to October 5 in Warsaw. The Annual meeting is the supreme forum of the Organization: ambassadors, representatives of state institutions and NGOs take part in the Meeting.

This year there was a Special Day on Roma and Sinti within the frames of the Annual Meeting. It was dedicated to Roma political participation and to the implementation of OSCE Plan for Roma and Sinti.

Bulgaria was represented by Ambassador Chavdar Jechev. Deyan Kolev (Chairman of Center “Amalipe”) was the only representative of Roma NGO from Bulgaria. In his statement he explained the reasons for the lack of implementation of the documents for Roma integration: low legal status, lack of budget financing and administrative infrastructure. He also spoke about the political participation and the abuses with the Roma ballot.

All participants supported the idea that significant efforts for stopping the practice of “purchasing Roma ballots” should be undertaken. Ensuring proper presence of Roma in the local institutions and in the local power is the key for success of these efforts.

Managing ethnic diversity in a multiethnic society

The Chairman of Center “Amalipe” Deyan Kolev was in USA to attend training course “Managing ethnic diversity in a multiethnic society”. The course was organized by Department of State of USA. Fourteen representatives of 14 European countries took part in it. Deyan Kolev was the only representative from Bulgaria; he was appointed by USA Embassy in Sofia.

The participants visited several cities (Washington DC, Memphis, Iowa, Santa Fe and San Francisco) to observe different aspects of the models for integration of different ethnic groups that compose the American Nation. Special



attention was paid to the integration of Afro-American, Native Americans, Muslims as well as to the challenge of illegal emigrants (who are almost 12 millions).

Appointments with Members of Congress, senators, mayors of the cities visited, representatives of state institutions, NGOs, religious institutions and media composed the agenda. The participants used the opportunity to realize many informal meetings with ordinary people outside the agenda in order to see their opinions about the integration. They also exchanged information about the solution of ethnic tension and conflicts in different European countries.

According to Deyan Kolev United States of America could be used as an expiring example that enough efforts should be invest for solving even the strongest ethnic problems and that if it is done the results unavoidably occur. Not all ethnic tensions in USA are solved at present but obviously many things are achieved and a lot of efforts and money are invested. In this respect Bulgaria and even Europe are far behind and should undertake serious steps. The USA models should not be transmitted directly since the situation in both societies is different but they could be used as ideas and as evidence that the preventive efforts for avoiding ethnic conflicts are better and cheaper than the post-event efforts for reconstructing societies after ethnic, religious or cultural conflicts.



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At a scandal session at the end of July 2007, the Bulgarian Parliament accepted amendments to the election law and *de facto* introduced an election barrier equal to the so-called “municipal election quota”. This quota is calculated by dividing the total number of actual votes to the number of city councilors. The parties which have not managed to pass this barrier automatically lose their right to participated in the redistribution of the votes in the City Council. For the smallest municipalities (those who have 11 city councilors) the election barrier is 9 % which automatically dooms the small parties to non-participation. In the bigger municipalities the barrier is lower but it is still a barrier for the small parties (and the Roma parties amongst them). At the same time, the so-called “Roma parties” have not managed to achieve even formal agreement and have decided to compete instead. The major nationally presented Roma parties who ran for the elections were Evroroma, Roma, DROM, and the newly-established Solidarnost. Regional unions like PLAM (Party of the liberal alternative and peace) also declared their presence at the local political scene (North-west Bulgaria). The Roma parties ran with their own candidates in 186 municipalities out of 264 municipalities in Bulgaria. In most of the place (113) Roma parties were competing each other. This led to dissipating the vote of the Roma voters who have decide to support a Roma party. The final result was the failure of the two or even three competing parties in one region to pass the new election barrier. For example, the DROM party managed to get 309 votes in Provadia, while Roma party got 469. The election barrier there was 500 votes so neither of the two parties managed to elect a city councilor while the sum of the votes of both parties had been enough for at least three or four councilors. Even more dramatic was the situation in Montana where all the Roma parties competed. Finally they could not send any representative. So as a result of all pointed above Roma city councilors have been

elected in 36 municipalities which is less than 14 % from the municipalities in Bulgaria.

Evrroma has shown the highest results from those parties who ran for the elections. It got 31 720 votes and 49 city councilors. Evroroma has got also another unexpected result – it got the majority votes in the Council of one of the richest municipalities in Bulgaria - Sandanski. This is the first municipality where the Roma councilors are majority although Roma in the municipality are not more than 10 %. This fact is due to the dissipating of the votes of ethnic Bulgarians among too many parties and the election barrier (see above): most of the parties could not pass the electoral barrier and their votes have been redistributed among the few who had done. So, surprisingly Evroroma turned to be the biggest party in the municipality although it has gotten only 6.34 % of the votes. In this case the new electoral system helped the Roma candidates.

Nevertheless, this success is relative since at the Parliamentary elections in 2005 the party got significantly higher number of votes – 45 637 in June 2005 compared to 31720 in October 2007.

The local elections have not marked an increase in the number of Roma included in the lists of the national parties from the left, right or central political spectrum. Roma have been elected city councilors from several non-Roma parties. This is not something new: we have been observing this process since 2003. Yet, it is still difficult to define what is the number of Roma city councilors from the lists of the so-called “national” (non-Roma) parties. It however is not significantly higher than 2003.

It is an interesting fact that well known members of the Roma political elite chose to run for these elections as representatives of national parties. For example, the chairman of DROM party has become a city councilor in Sofia from the list of the biggest oppositional party GERB. Other Roma leaders who in the past had represented Roma parties have done the same.

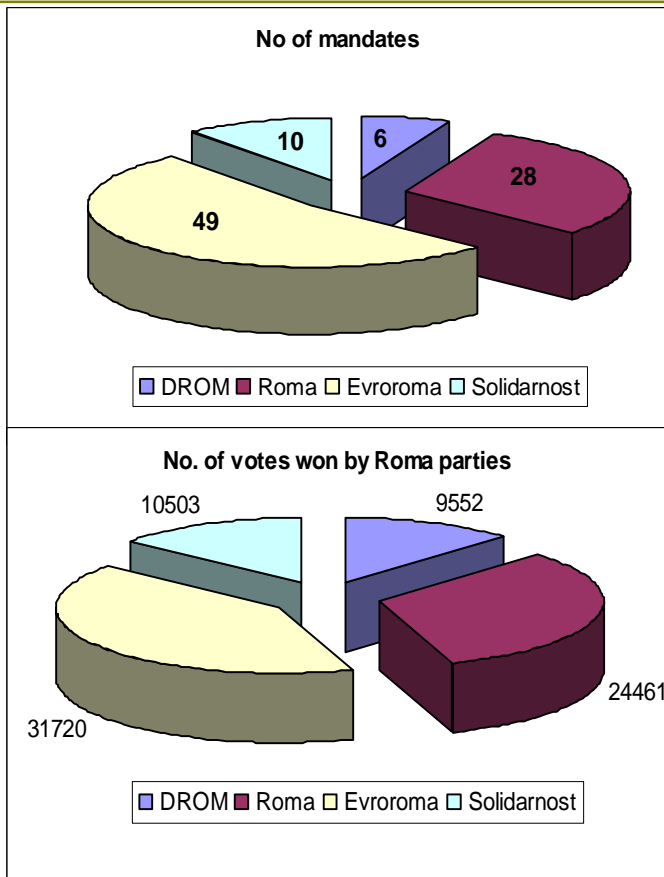
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The selling of Roma votes has turned to be one of the magic topics during these local elections: both, for media and politicians. The selling of thousands of votes has not be something new: this is a practice all the parties have been relying on for years. Candidates from ALL parties have been buying votes at these elections. There have been however two new



phenomena. First, it has not been only Roma votes that have been traded. Thousands of ethnic Bulgarians, predominantly young people alienated from political parties, have been also selling their votes. According to one of the leading Bulgarian sociologists Zhivko Georgiev almost half of the votes that had been sold at these elections have been young ethnic Bulgarians. Second, the public reaction towards this practice was a

new thing: both media and NGOs sharply condemned this practice (Center Amalipe, for example, has carried out a campaign among Roma in Veliko Turnovo region “Don’t sell your vote”). Parties have criticizing each other for buying votes although each one of them has been very actively doing it.

The local elections 2007 showed again the low level of participation of Romani women or rather the lack of readiness of Roma political leaders to give more chances to women in politics. Only 9% of the city councilors elected from Roma parties are women. At the same time, there is significantly higher number of women mayors candidates from Roma parties. It is a curious fact however that in many cases the mayor candidates are not even included in lists for city councilors and this is one of the reasons for the small number of Romani women city councilors.

THE CRISIS OF THE ROMA PARTIES:

The local elections showed again the deep crisis the so-called Roma parties are in. Three indicators clearly define this crisis. First, the Roma parties have not managed to transform the high number of votes fro them into higher number of city councilors. To some extend it is due to the immaturity of the Roma political elite which could not find the formula to unite and dissipated the Roma votes without turning them into mandates. Second, key political figures from the Roma parties preferred to run for the elections as candidates from the “national” (non-Roma) parties. (to clarify: it is not meant here a coalition between a Roma party and a mainstream party, but a candidate from the list of the mainstream party). It turned out that even the leaders consider it risky to run for the elections from their own Roma party. It leads to the appearance of an assumption that the candidates in the Roma lists are those who have not succeeded to be included in the mainstream party lists.

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“Don’t sell your vote!”



The local elections are already over and Bulgaria has its new mayors. There were a number of peculiarities at these elections: starting from the integral ballot to the new election system which has resulted in a number of complains in the local courts all over the country.

What has not been changed however was the practice of buying Roma votes. That’s why center Amalipe decided to develop a GOTV campaign and oppose this practice with a broad community awareness campaign.

The campaign “Don’t Sell Your Vote!” was carried out with the support of OSCE among the Roma communities in Strazhitza, Zlataritzza, and Veliko Turnovo before the local elections. The aim of the campaign was to explain the voting manner, the number of ballots, and to motivate the voters to support those candidates which would solve their problems. It was directed mainly to the Roma from Veliko Turnovo region, and mostly to the Roma living in the villages where the problems are the sharpest. “We are far from thinking that with just a single campaign we could stop this vicious practice. In order to do this many things should be changed: politicians should stop buying votes because the demand defines the supply; at the same time voters should be able to find a candidate they could trust, an alternative who would change something in their lives for the next four years.” – Deyan Kolev, coordinator of the campaign, shared.

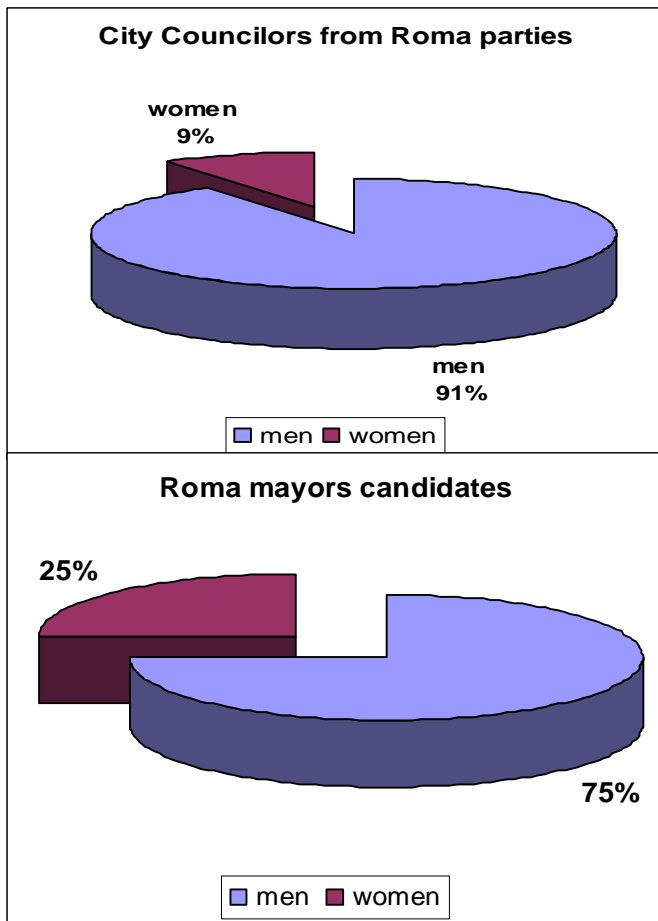
Within the campaign brochures and a short movie were prepared.

The messages on the brochure and the movie come from the community itself; they are in a language which is understandable for the people and can easily reach them. The experience of Center Amalipe has shown that such a campaign can easily use the modern technologies in order to get closer to the people. The short movie was distributed on CD-s. It turned out that most of the families, especially in the villages do not watch so much TV, but they all have access to DVD-Players and can watch a movie. The observations of Center Amalipe showed that the movie is well accepted by the community: it is interesting, attractive and the people recognize themselves there; they find a way to watch it and it influences their attitudes regarding the practice of buying and selling votes.



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After the local elections: is the appearance of a strong Roma party possible?

All prognoses in this direction although based on the results from real elections are close to science fiction. Nevertheless, analyzing the last elections we can say that the appearance of a strong Roma party is possible, but not at the present condition of the so-called “Roma political elite”.

Two tendencies make the appearance of a strong Roma party possible. The first is the increasing number of votes for Roma parties. At these elections the Roma parties received around three percents from the votes. If this tendency persists it is highly possible that at parliamentary elections an eventual coalition of Roma parties passes the barrier of 4% and becomes a parliamentary power. The second tendency is the durable unwillingness of the mainstream parties to involve more Roma in their lists. This favors the separation of the Roma community in the favor of the so-called “Roma parties.”

On the other hand it is obvious that the Roma political elite is incapable of building a unified political structure which could turn the votes into real mandates. At this stage there are no signs for a change in the Roma political elite.

The appearance/ non-appearance of a strong Roma party will depend on two important factors: the readiness of the mainstream parties for real inclusion of the Roma community in its agenda and respectively Roma representatives in their lists, and the condition of the Roma political elite. The continuation of the tendency for not including the Roma community by the mainstream parties, combined with the renovation and political growing up of the Roma elite could lead to the establishment of a strong Roma party. The other possibilities rather prevent such a result.

This assumption is definitely not true in many of the cases but it ruins the confidence in the Roma parties. Third, although the Roma parties received an outstandingly high number of votes they haven't managed to get the majority of the Roma votes. Most of Roma preferred to vote for non-Roma parties.

Since the mainstream parties are still far from the idea to include more Roma at t elective places in their lists, the crisis of the Roma parties at present means also a crisis of the Roma political participation. The latter still continues to be rather nominality than reality (if we may use the language of medieval philosophy).



A seminar for social workers “How to work in the Roma community”

A three-day seminar for social workers from Sofia and Pazardjik took part in Veliko Turnovo on 8th and 9th of October. It was organized by the Institute for Social Activities and Practices and Center Amalipe within a Phare project.

The aim of the seminar was to train the social workers how to work in the Roma community stressing on the need to distinguish and take into account the specifics of the different Roma subgroups. The seminar was divided into a theoretical and a practical part. Besides the lectures and the interactive techniques used it included also field work in two Roma neighbourhoods - Garata and Kaltinetz in Gorna Oryahovitza. In this way the participants had to overcome their prejudices about Roma by going to the people themselves, in their houses and talking to



them. On the basis of their impressions they had to define future priorities for work in the Roma community. Part of the training was also visiting the Kaldarash Roma cemetery in Lyaskovetz and acquainting the participants with some elements of Roma culture.

„We think that the training was useful and it would really help the people in their work” – said Deyan Kolev. At the end of the seminar the participants received certificates. “I have expected to receive information about the Roma community and how to work with these people. The seminar came up to my expectations. I have learned many new things and this is useful for me. You create very pleasant atmosphere. You should continue in the same way.” – one of the participants shared after the seminar.

Summer School for Community Development – 2007 Mamaia, Romania

A one-week summer school for community development took place in Mamaia, Romania from 24 to 30 September, financed by the European Commission. 20 Romanian and 20 Bulgarian NGOs, amongst which Center Amalipe, took part in the training.

The role of community practitioners, mapping of community problems, self-employment in rural areas, and conflict prevention were some of the topics discussed at the summer school. The Summer school for community development is organized for the second time. Last year it was organized by Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundations, Bulgaria while this year it was hosted by the Romanian association for community development.

Dushan Ondrujek and Karolina Mikova from Partners for Democratic Change – Slovakia were the lecturers at the training. The experts think that it is difficult to work in the field of community development, especially in rural areas and when settlements are inhabited by people of different ethnic background or religion.

Up to now Center Amalipe has mapped the problems of the local Roma communities in more than 20 settlements from Veliko Turnovo District. “To work for solving people’s problems needs full devotion. Sometimes it is very hard. But the belief that there is nothing impossible makes you do wonders.” – Atanas Stoyanov who participated in the Summer School from Center Amalipe shared.



“Diversity and social cohesion – Equal participation of minorities”

Conference “Diversity and social cohesion – Equal participation of minorities” took part in Tuzla (Bosnia and Hertzegovina) from 8th to 10th of November. It was part of a two-year project of Justitia et Pax (the Netherlands), Liga Pro Europa (Romania), Public Movement Multinational Georgia (Georgia), Helsinki Citizens Assembly (Bosnia) and Center “Amalipe” (Bulgaria).

Theoretical issues of intercultural education and practical questions for applying intercultural education in European countries were the main topics discussed during the conference.

Deyan Kolev and Teodora Krumova presented the successful experience of Center “Amalipe” for introducing “Folklore of the ethnoi – Roma folklore” classes as well as the work done by Amalipe during 2007 for establishing network of schools applying intercultural education.

The participants elaborated a platform with concrete tasks and demands that would be sent to the Council of Europe.

More than 50 teachers were trained how to teach Roma culture in school

A seminar for teachers from the territory of the whole country who are about to start teaching Roma folklore and culture took place in Veliko Turnovo



SCHOOL



from 5th to 7th October. The seminar was organized by Center Amalipe with the support of the Dutch foundation Justitia et Pax.

Within three days the teachers were taught how to get the children acquainted with the Roma folklore and culture. The number of interactive methods of education applied during the seminar, the multimedia and videomaterials shown aimed at helping the teachers make their lessons more interesting and thus keep children at school and motivated to learn. During the seminars there were lectures on the different aspects of Roma culture in Bulgaria: festive and narrative traditions, St. Basil's day, St. George's Days, the Bairams, and so on. One of the topics which were of the highest interest for the teachers was the wedding lecture. In addition, teachers were acquainted with the Roma narrative folklore and the specific of the Roma fairy-tales, as well as how to use the pedagogical materials prepared for these classes.

The Roma folklore program has been created and developing since 2002. Now it includes more than 230 schools from all over the country. “The aim of this subject is to make the children aware of the richness of the Roma folklore, and at the same time teach them to be tolerant and respect the others.” – Teodora Krumova says. Due to the high interest on behalf of other teachers as well it is possible that one more seminar is organized by the end of the year.

we present you ... Center Amalipe



*Tzanko Tzerkovski Primary School
Village of Srediste, Silistra Region*

This time we have united the two headings because the story we want to present you combines elements of both. We present you "Tzanko Tzerkovski" Primary School in the village of Srediste, Silistra region. The school is one of these sparks which has been preserving the cultural heritage of the village for years no matter to which ethnic group it belongs. Something more, they manage to include this treasure in their school classes.

During the last school year 26 students were included in the Roma folklore classes from the 2nd and the 6th grades. We understand this from the materials sent to us by their teachers Rumiana Stefanova and neli Stamatova who are no doubt the favorite teachers of the students.

Up to now the enthusiastic students and their teachers have done a lot of field work in the villages of Srediste and Davidovo! They have searched, found, recorded, and presented folk medical practices.

The students in the two groups are part of each school celebration. They have even received a charter from the Minister of education Daniel Valchev.

The children from Srediste have no time to get bored. During the year they:

- payed a visit in the camp of Kalajdzhii Roma
- took part in a march dedicated to the leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival
- payed a visit to each other for the two big feasts: Bajram and Christmas;
- prepared cooking books with all kinds of delicacies: "Grandma's recipes for Bajram and New Year";
- visited a number of theater plays;
- and many other things but we would not have space to tell you about all of them.

There was something very interesting. The children participated in the Second municipal fair "We the Roma are also European citizens". It was organized by Kajnardzha municipality and Stefan Karazdha Chitaliste in Srediste for which we should congratulate the two institutions. The students were awarded with the prize for the best oriental dance J

Beside this the children from Srediste are very talented writers. You read below a piece of what they have written;

Magicians

In our jolly company
there are Bulgarians, Roma and Tatars -
most of us are magicians
we drive the crowd crazy
because they study physics J
We blow balloons,
We travel to space in our minds,
We draw with sympathetic ink,
We quickly put on and off our shoes
The show of our jolly company today
Wants to say: "Be healthy and gay!"

*Myustedzeb Ahmed, 6th grade
Tzanko Tzerkovski school, Srediste*

And we, in turn, with the children and the teachers from Srediste to preserve their enthusiasm and smiles!

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